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United States Department of State

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July 26, 1994

MEMORANDUM TO WILLIAM H. ITOH
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

SUBJECT: Rwanda Refugee Crisis: The U.S. Mobilizes

The gruesome television footage from eastern Zaire and the unfavorable press coverage of the airdrop of relief supplies near Goma belie the massive and sustained effort undertaken by the United States to provide humanitarian relief to Rwandan refugees. The U.S. military began to deploy resources on July 22, and in four days, the U.S. delivered 1,300 tons of humanitarian goods, water purification equipment, and put 750 personnel into the field, including medical and logistics teams, master loaders and engineers.

The July 24 airdrop north of Goma was roundly criticized. It was late and a few hundred meters off target but delivered 34,000 pounds of food to the refugees. At the same time, the U.S. demonstrated a flexible response to the crisis: the UNHCR asked for assistance with water and we supplied within four days five sets of purification equipment capable of delivering 3000 gallons of potable water per hour. The U.S. will airlift 17 German water purification units to Goma, along with 70 technicians and relief workers, and we have 13 sets en route to Mombasa for onward shipment to the region.

The U.S. and international efforts to respond to the crisis in eastern Zaire and Rwanda have now run into a fundamental logistical problem: paucity of runway space. The Ugandan authorities have been cooperative, but Entebbe airport is overwhelmed and its capacity has been taxed to the maximum. In Zaire, the inadequate provincial airfield at Goma cannot support the multiple missions of the U.S., France and others.

To resolve the airfield logjam, the U.S. is now looking at Kigali as a bridgehead for channeling relief supplies to the refugees. Ambassador David Rawson has secured blanket overflight and landing clearances for our aircraft from the Rwandan authorities, and the first U.S. assessment teams

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arrived in Kigali on July 26. The Kigali runway is in good condition and under UNAMIR control. Running the U.S. humanitarian operation through the Rwandan capital offers the dual advantages of proximity and magnetism: it is roughly two hours from Goma, and could attract refugees back to their country. We have put the issue of recognition of the new government aside and will concentrate for the moment on working with the authorities in Kigali to assure the success of the humanitarian mission to the region.

for 
Marc Grossman
Executive Secretary

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